

# A Process of Personal Growth, Maturity

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"Buddhist meditation, as the Buddha taught it, is a psychological technique of transcending human weaknesses and human suffering through the evolution of the human consciousness. This evolution of consciousness is a process of growth and expansion of awareness consciously achieved through a systematic psychological technique. When this gradual evolutionary growth, expansion, and unfolding of the human consciousness has reached the ultimate point of maturity, this attainment is called the "Harmonious Full Awakening" (Samma Sam Bodhi). The one who awakens in this way is called the "Harmoniously Awakened One" (Samma Sam Buddha).

The use of the term "awakening" is to indicate that this expansion of consciousness is an awakening to reality, which means, the normal human being is not fully awakened to reality. That is, the normal human consciousness is not conscious of reality. In fact, according to the Buddha, it is in conflict with reality. This is why the human being is said to be normally suffering, and the aim of Buddhism is to bring this normal suffering to an end. The term "harmonious", means freedom from conflict with reality. It is being in harmony with reality.

This also implies that this kind of awakening is not a normal experience. It is a supernormal experience. It is an awakening to a super normal reality, which is quite different from the reality that normal people experience. This supernormal awakening is therefore quite different from the normal awakening from normal sleep. The normal awakened state is, according to the Buddha, a sleep or dream or fantasy. The aim of Buddhist meditation therefore is to awaken from this dream full of suffering, into a supernormal reality, where there is a supernormal level of mental health, goodness, happiness, and truth.

Humanistic Religion Buddhism avoids the common theistic and mystical interpretation of the religious experience as "the union of the soul with God." Instead, it takes a psychological standpoint. Buddhism, being a humanistic religion, is not built around the concept of the Creator God, but is centered on human interests and speaks about human potentials. Buddhists believe that the human consciousness can evolve to a level of divine perfection. A human being who transcends the ordinary human limitations in knowledge, power and goodness, and attains to this state of perfection is called, "God become" (brahma bhuto). This state of perfection is identical with that of the "Harmoniously Awake One", the BUDDHA.

From this Buddhist point of view, "God" is seen as the ideal of human perfection that the human being conceives, and struggles to realize through the practice of religion. When the human being does realize this ideal of perfection, he "becomes God". This "God" of the Buddhist may be seen as an anthropomorphic God, though He is not seen as the Creator of the world, or His son or messenger. This "God", from a Buddhist point of view, is seen rather as the destroyer of the world. This is because the world, as the Buddha sees it, is an illusion (maya) created by the human consciousness. It is from this illusory dream that one has to awaken, in order to be free of human suffering. Because the Buddha frees people from this illusion, he can be called the destroyer of the world.

This Buddha who is not the Creator of the world, or His son, or even His messenger, but the destroyer of the world can be misunderstood to be a Devil. But the fact that he is on the side of goodness and not on the side of evil supports the fact that he cannot be called a Devil. Buddhists honor and worship the Buddha, because Buddhists believe that He, in the human body, reached the "Supreme State of Perfection" that all religions worship, what ever be the form in which they conceive it. The Buddha is traditionally, described by Buddhists as "the God of gods" (devatideva) and as "God by purity of mind" (visuddhi deva). This is not a deification of a human being but the description of the evolution of the human being. It is also the redefinition of the term "God", and the redefinition of the term "religion" from a humanistic standpoint. From this humanistic standpoint, God does not create the human being, but the human being creates God in his own image.

Religion, defined from the Buddhist standpoint, is the struggle of the human being to solve the problem of human existence. This problem is the problem of evil, unhappiness, and death. The solution is sought through the pursuit of goodness, eternal happiness, and eternal life. This pursuit ultimately takes the form of the pursuit of the ideal of human perfection. This ideal of human perfection is seen as the perfection in goodness, happiness, and wisdom. Religion, from the theistic standpoint, has come down to earth from heaven, to solve the problem of a Creator. But from the humanistic point of view, religion has grown up on earth, to solve a human problem, through the perfection of human nature. Buddhists do not therefore speak of a "God become man", but of a "man become God". This "God" of the Buddhist therefore is a "theopsychic man" rather than an "anthropomorphic God".

**The Purpose of Meditation** The Buddhist meditation is not a mystical practice. Our aim is not to become mystics. This technique of meditation is for people living a secular life, as householders, doing jobs, having family responsibilities, and involved in various relationships. What such people need is freedom from stress, peace of mind, healthy relationships, self-confidence, success in life, and efficiency at work. This means, learning to gain control over the emotions that prevent them from performing their duties effectively. These problematic emotional excitements can come in the form of lust, hate, fear, worry, or anxiety. Buddhist meditation, practiced in the right way, can help one be free of emotional disturbances, so that one is free to think clearly and act rationally.

This Buddhist technique of meditation does not involve chanting mantras, exercises in concentration, or entering trance states. It involves efforts to consciously purify the mind. When the mind is purified one experiences an inner exhilaration. This exhilaration can mature into rapture. When the body relaxes, one feels comfortable. When the body is comfortable, the mind enters a state of equilibrium. When the mind is in equilibrium, kindness and compassion is experienced. Such a tranquil mind can also think clearly, resulting in intelligent behaviour.

The rapture that we refer to is not a state of emotional excitement. And the kindness or compassion that we speak of is not based on an attachment. This rapture is a state of happiness based on mental tranquility, and the kindness is a state of selflessness. According to the Buddha, emotional excitement is not true happiness, and attachment is not true love. Therefore our method of meditation is aimed at cultivating a tranquil mind and a relaxed body, resulting in the experience of happiness, comfort and kindness, accompanied by intelligent thought and action.

**Samatha and Vipassana** One often hears today of the two terms - Samatha and Vipassana. Samatha is the cultivation of tranquillity, and Vipassana, commonly translated as insight, is the cultivation of the objective awareness of the subjective mental process.

Most writers, when they describe samatha bhavana, think of it as practicing concentration, but true meaning of samatha is not concentration. Concentration only leads to the hypnotic state. It is well known as the Braids method of hypnosis. This wrong translation has made some people to think that samadhi is hypnotic trance. Concentration is a mistranslation of the term samadhi, which has been blindly adhered to through many generations of English translators.

The term samadhi literally means balance or equilibrium. The Buddha defined it as "cittakaggata", which means the homogeneity of disposition (cittadisposition; ekaggata=homogeneity or uniformity). This term has also been mistranslated as "one-pointedness of mind," conveying the meaning of concentration.

"Homogeneity of disposition" is the description of a mind free of conflicting emotions. That means harmony, tranquillity or equilibrium. It is therefore important to understand that Buddhist meditation does not involve concentration or hypnosis. Samatha meditation is not the practice of self-hypnosis, and samadhi is not a hypnotic trance. Samatha meditation is a process of purifying and tranquilizing the mind, through a series of gradually deepening levels of tranquillity. Samadhi refers to this series of gradually deepening levels of emotional and mental tranquillity, achieved through a gradual reduction of experience.

The term vipassana when translated as "insight" can be misleading too. This is because the term "insight" as it is used in modern psychology, carries a different meaning. In psychology, it is used to mean a sudden solution of a problem, and in psychotherapy; it is understood as, bringing into awareness of repressed emotions.

In Buddhist meditation, the term vipassana refers to an experience best described as the direct awareness of the mental process of experiencing. Experiencing here means: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking and feeling.

This reflective awareness of experience is not a concept unfamiliar to the Western mind. The philosopher Leibniz referred to it as apperception. Kant distinguished between empirical and transcendental apperception. We could use the term "transcendental apperception", as Kant used it, to refer to abhinna, which is the ultimate result of the practice of vipassana meditation. One can understand this fully, however, only when one is able to experience it oneself. Until then, it will only be a theory. It is therefore not so much an experience to be conceptualized as one to be actualized. The practice of vipassana leads to panna, which occurs due to a paradigm shift, which is a shift from the "experience of existence" to the "experience of experience". It is not staying in the second paradigm but seeing experience from both points of view and gaining a broader perspective (parinna). This cognitive transparency which results from this transcendental apperception, is called "penetrative awareness" (Pali: panna ; Skrt.: prajna).

## References

- <http://www.protobuddhism.com/joomla/>

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